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# THE NEW INFLUENCE ON THE BRITISH THRONE.

BY LADY JEUNE.

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PROVIDENCE, which often seems capricious in guiding the fate of nations, decreed, at three important epochs in English history, that the reigning Sovereign should be a Queen, and not a King. The reigns of Elizabeth and Anne were times of momentous issues, and the reign of Victoria was one great social revolution from beginning to end.

It would be very difficult to compare the rule of any of these three Queens with those of the other two, and yet, in some respects, they were all similar. Elizabeth ruled a country just emerging from the throes of the Reformation, while she had to reckon with a powerful party at home, which was alien in religion, aided by the greatest Catholic power of the world, and animated by fervent devotion to the loveliest and most unfortunate of rivals, who was the mother of a son, while she herself was unmarried and without an heir. A woman of strong will and passions, imperious and brave, she chose her advisers well, and, with the growing Protestant feeling of the country to support her, she destroyed the power of Spain. Her time was one of great statesmen, philosophers, soldiers, sailors, explorers, and men of letters, and she gave her name to an era which is one of the most glorious in English history. The reign of Queen Anne was again a period of external development; but she, like Elizabeth, found her strength in the Protestant feeling of Europe, and in the genius of the greatest soldier of the day. She also was childless, but, though the Roman Catholic party were open and avowed sympathizers with the Stuarts, the question of the succession was no longer in doubt. The reign of Anne, also, was rich in distinguished men—soldiers, sailors, poets, historians. Though Anne

was inferior in every way to her great predecessor, she was a woman of unblemished character, and she was a fitting Queen for her time; and the halo which surrounds her reign is in many ways no less brilliant than that which was imparted to her epoch by Queen Elizabeth. Queen Elizabeth and Queen Anne, however, both reigned at times when rulers of inferior abilities could not have occupied the throne of England. The great wars of both reigns were waged to uphold the supremacy of the Catholic power in Europe, and to crush the young Protestant feeling of the day. England, the champion of the new faith, was sorely pressed in the time of Elizabeth by Philip of Spain, and by Louis XIV. in the later reign. To England the struggle was of vital importance, as defeat meant her complete annihilation: any hesitation, any faltering, any mistake on her part would have altered the fate of the world. But the struggle was won, and it was won in great measure because the government of the English nation was in the hands of women, under the guidance of statesmen and soldiers of the highest ability.

The accession of Queen Victoria saw England again at the beginning of another period of trial and danger, but, this time, of an internal and social nature. The country was suffering from the effects of the costly Napoleonic wars; there was great distress and poverty. The dynasty to which she belonged was unpopular, not only because of the stupidity and immorality of its representatives, but because it presented no sentiment, no ideal, to a people chivalrous and romantic in many respects. The social and political changes of the last sixty years were just beginning. The discovery of steam power, and its adaptation to the service of modern life; the awaking of the interest of the working classes in the questions which so closely affected their welfare; and the passing of the Reform Bill, which entirely changed the centre of political power, were all creating a feeling of unrest and discontent. The aristocratic governing class had just been divested of political power, and that power had been handed over to the democracy, who were ignorant and impatient at the conditions under which they lived, and eager to show their strength. The effect of Free Trade was just giving birth to great industrial changes, the Manchester school had sprung into existence, and with all the zeal of those who, for the first time, possess power, the working classes were making their voice heard in the

councils of the nation. The poverty in many parts of the country, the wretched plight of the workers in factories and in all industrial enterprises, had aroused a sentiment of revolt; while the Chartist riots showed how keenly a large number of the citizens were resolved that there should be gigantic improvements in every condition of life.

The situation was full of grave menace to the future of England, and it required the wisdom of ministers, the forbearance of the aristocracy and the patience of the working classes to deal successfully with the problems to which it gave rise. Above all, it was necessary, at such a juncture, that the occupant of the throne should scrupulously observe the limitations which the constitution had set to the powers and privileges of the Crown. The very seriousness of the situation, perhaps, made that moment appropriate, in a unique sense, for the accession of a queen; and the presence of a girl on the throne, surrounded by wise and experienced advisers, may well have afforded the best security conceivable for the peaceful solution of the national problem. At any rate, as one reviews the events of Victoria's reign, with its marvellous developments, its complete social revolution, its increase of colonial and imperial power, its domestic peace, its growth of wealth and prosperity, its spread of education, together with the improvement in the condition of life of every class, and the profound popular devotion to the Queen, one asks whether, or in what measure, the Victorian age was the great epoch it undoubtedly proved to be because the ruler of England was a woman.

The questions which the country had to decide during the early years of Queen Victoria's reign concerned themselves with subjects which appealed to the heart of a woman—the deplorable situation of the laboring classes, the disgraceful position of women and children working in factories and mines, the much neglected state of education, the depression in trade and the intolerable conditions of life from which thousands of the people were groaning for deliverance. These were fitted to arouse the womanly interest and sympathy of the Queen, so that she could naturally and easily associate herself with nearly all the reforms required, even if she were not able to put herself at the head of the movement. The sight of the Queen, her excessive youth, her generous, responsive answer to all that was asked of her, awoke

the sentimental and romantic feeling that a woman under such circumstances must always call forth. It was accorded to her by an affectionate and warm-hearted people. Her youth and isolation appealed to every one, while her early marriage and happy married life, and her devotion to her husband, completed an ideal picture of home, graced by the qualities which a people like the English understand and appreciate. This feeling was, it is true, from time to time, rudely shaken, and there were occasions, even during the early part of the reign, when the Queen, as representing Royalty, was unpopular. There were times when she drove in London and not a hat was raised nor a cheer given, and when her path was full of difficulties, which it needed the wisest and calmest judgment to surmount. There are many still alive who remember the long silent drives which she took through London, and contrast them with the passionate and fervent enthusiasm which her later appearances always evoked, when thousands and thousands of her subjects waited for many hours to catch a glimpse of their Queen as she paid one of her rare visits to the metropolis. That she found the sagest of counsellors in her husband there can be no doubt, and, misjudged and unpopular as the Prince Consort once was, he lived to be appreciated by a people who learned too late, alas! what a debt they owed him.

The great principle of government impressed on the Queen by Lord Melbourne, her first Prime Minister, was the importance of her being a thoroughly constitutional sovereign, and so deeply did she take his teaching to heart, that during her reign she placed the Monarchy, as an institution, on a position of permanent strength.

We are now on the threshold of a new reign, and of an altogether different sentiment. King Edward has succeeded after a long apprenticeship, which he has served conscientiously and well; and he comes to the throne of his ancestors with the enthusiastic affection of his people. It is not from a personal point of view that we discuss the new position, or judge it in contrast with the reign just ended. It is a question of much interest, and one not easy to decide, whether a country prospers best under a male or a female sovereign; for though in England, where a monarch must needs be constitutional, the powers of a male and

female monarch are exactly alike, there are circumstances which may render the character of the reign of the one essentially different from the rule of the other. The power of the early kings of England lay in their military position, and their absolute authority. If we think of the kings of England before Henry VIII., it is as soldiers only, wielding the power which in those stormy times appertained to the king. The revolutions through which England passed in order to establish her right to govern herself, deprived the kings of their military power and curtailed their rights. Since the early Plantagenets, no King of England has appeared on the stage of history as a great soldier, such as was Frederick the Great and other royal heroes. The tendency of constitutional government has been steadily to diminish the personal power of the King, so that he has become merely the exponent of the views of his people, as expressed through Parliament.

The English people have not much reason to be proud of their later kings. The members of the Hanoverian house were meddling, stupid, narrow-minded Germans; and when they did interfere in questions of importance, their action was always disastrous. The separation of America from Great Britain was the result of the obstinacy of George III., and the gradual strengthening of Parliament was the logical outcome of a succession of incompetent rulers. Had the transition period of modern English history, from the passing of the Reform Bill until to-day, come during the reign of another George III., it would not have been the bloodless revolution it was. A man with any character, any spirit, any belief in the rights of kings, must have been forced into opposition to the new ideas, the ultimate effect of which was to put almost unlimited power into the hands of a then ignorant democracy; and he would have had support and encouragement from the aristocratic classes of both political parties, who equally hated and dreaded the changes. All the political events of the century have diminished the power of the Crown, and have broken down the tradition of the personal importance of the Sovereign, so that the position of a man on the throne during this period would have been one of exceeding difficulty and danger. It was a most fortunate accident that gave England a young and adaptive girl as ruler at that moment, and allowed her long and marvellous reign to bridge over the period

during which the old customs were passing away, and the new order of things adapting itself to the new conditions under which the Kingdom was to exist—which, while destroying the personal autocracy of the Monarchy, has in reality had the effect of strengthening the Monarchy to an extent difficult to describe.

The nineteenth century was a humanitarian age, and its quality as such could be best fostered and developed during the reign of a queen. If Queen Victoria had no other claim to the gratitude of the Empire than that she endeavored to carry out the highest ideals for the welfare of her people and the general amelioration of their social and political condition, we should yet owe her much. We have, however, perhaps, overdone our humanitarianism a little, and are passing in a measure through an emotional and somewhat hysterical stage. The self-control which has been one of the most cherished of English characteristics, has disappeared to some extent, and we stand in need of a sterner and more bracing influence, which the new rule may perhaps inaugurate. A king can be stern and strong: a queen cannot. It is possible to speak plainly, to discuss matters, nay, even to argue, with a man; with a woman we all know the result. No woman is logical; and, however unemotional and masculine, she will act from impulse and not reason. A woman's impulse is to be gentle, sweet, gracious; and the whole course of her life and her impulses moves in that direction, while the age in which she lives becomes impregnated by the same spirit. Therefore, it follows, especially where we have a strong personality, as in the case of Queen Victoria, that, though the standard does not fall or even become relaxed, questions are regarded from a less robust point of view. The very womanliness of the Queen, which gave her the power she possessed and the affection she won, caused all her influence to be thrown on the side of leniency; and the isolation in which she lived (the outcome of the great sorrow of her life) prevented her from judging of the true proportion of things, and added to the sentiment with which her people regarded her, so that the womanliness of the Queen had the effect of diminishing the hardihood of the national character, and of encouraging a spirit of "gush," which, though the last quality with which she would have had sympathy, has unconsciously become a strongly marked characteristic of to-day. The tenderness of the Queen and her sympathy with those in sorrow—as always shown, on the

occasion of any public calamity, by her messages to the widows of colliers, sailors, soldiers, or any class of the community on whom some terrible disaster had fallen—and her hatred of capital punishment, were strongly marked features of her character: and though with many of the fads and fashions of her time she had no sympathy, it was difficult for her, as a woman, though a Queen, to proclaim publicly that she disapproved of them. There must have been occasions when the Queen would have perhaps astonished the country, could it have been realized how she regarded many of the questions and developments of her time, but her kindness, and her desire not to wound, kept her silent. A man would probably be less tolerant; at any rate, no one would expect such reserve or consideration from him. A woman shrinks from any action which might have the effect of crushing a movement which, while she did not sympathize with it, she yet believed to be a genuine attempt to do good, and which might possibly be of some efficacy in that direction. A woman understands the enthusiasm and can throw herself into the position of those who preach crusades against the abuses they see around them, feeling that the woes and sufferings of life are beyond endurance. In fact, there is no humanitarian movement, wise or foolish, which the heart of a good woman does not go out to, and the sixty years of Queen Victoria's reign proved how thoroughly in that respect she was like her sex.

There is a great opportunity now for stimulating and bracing the national life and character. There is no need for sternness or hardness, but a true perception of the proportion and importance of events will produce a manlier sentiment. We are all inclined to judge conduct leniently, to make allowances, to justify actions in private life, just as, until the war in South Africa forced us into an opposite course, we have shrunk from taking up an aggressive position in public matters. It is not good for a country or a people to shirk the responsibilities which from time to time confront them, and which ought to be faced. It was no secret that the Queen, like many women, dreaded war; her feelings, her influence, were always on the side of peace. When war had to be undertaken, however, no one met it more courageously than she; and, though the smoke of battle was the cloud on the last months of her life, she never wavered in her belief in the righteousness of the cause we are upholding in South Africa.



For many years of her reign, the Queen's advisers were "Peace at any price" men, and, constitutional as she ever was, she followed their advice—often, however, warning and protesting against the policy. In the position of monarch, a man could be less easily advised or persuaded to adopt such a policy; it would be more difficult for his advisers to convince him that he must acquiesce. In all the questions of life and of government he would take a broader view than a woman, and he could do so with perfect security, knowing that the country would expect him to be less yielding. In fact, the composition of a man's character, as well as his bearing and education, must necessarily create a totally different atmosphere of life and attitude of mind with regard to affairs, and the country would be prepared to see, and willing to recognize, any indication that it was under the sway of a strong personal influence, such as that of a sensible man of the world, who lived in touch with his people.

The late Queen's power lay, in a great measure, in the strong moral hold she exercised over the country; she came to the throne at a moment when an example of high conduct was needed; her whole life and reign was one of absolute and blameless purity, and the power of a woman in these days must always be embodied in that fact. She raised the moral tone of life, gave higher aspirations and a higher standard of conduct to the world. To her people she was the unselfish devoted Queen, the good wife and mother—in fact, the representative of the virtue we admire and prize. The great women of the world have not set the same example to their people—Catherine of Russia and Queen Elizabeth were great Queens, but in another sense. Purity of life, tenderness of heart, were not their rôle: they governed by right of birth, and they governed almost with the strength, the power and the passions, of a man. They suited the times in which they lived, when the world was not ready for the influences we look for to-day. They were cruel, hard, rapacious, sensual; but they had courage, ability and the instinct of government, as well as real personal power, and the times over which they reigned required the rougher, coarser, methods of control. There are certain faults and weaknesses in a man which are ignored, and not judged too harshly—even to-day, when we demand a high code of conduct—which in a woman would be impossible, for in her case no standard is too high, and any descent from the highest would

be fatal to her power. The purest life, the keenest consciousness of responsibility, and the noblest sense of duty made Queen Victoria's reign an epoch quite apart from any other in history; and, even when the cold eye of criticism scans her history, that stainless life, on which the fierce light which beats upon a throne found never a shadow, will shine on as a precious example. We owe much to her great constitutional sense, to her generous and unselfish nature, but we owe her the deepest gratitude of all for the pattern she set us of what the life of a good and pure woman could be, and for the effect of that example all over her Empire.

Regard for self-interest and the instinct of self-preservation are as deep in the life of an Empire as in that of an individual; and though those feelings have been strong elements in the birth of Imperial life in England and throughout her Colonies, the golden chain which held them all together in the tightest of bonds was the common love and respect for the "Great White Queen." If, as we said before, the sentiment of attachment to her, and the softening influence of a woman, gave a somewhat undue impetus to the spirit of humanitarianism, which many affirm has weakened our national character, one can hardly regret it when we look on the other side of the picture, and realize what the effect of any other influence might have been. It has not injured us permanently, and, standing now on the threshold of a century in which the most powerful influence is a masculine one, we may look for changes in endless directions which must be the result of the reign of a King. There is no doubt that there will be a more masculine atmosphere, a more hardy tone of thought and mind. The position of women, we believe, will be affected very distinctly by the substitution of a Queen Consort for a reigning Queen. The ruling monarch must give the tone to character, thought, occupation, amusements, and must, indeed, be the prominent figure; the tenderness, the softness, the humanitarianism, the latitude of the past will gradually disappear, and the influence of a new order will evolve characteristics of a more vigorous sort.

Those who deplore the disappearance of the harder and stronger characteristics of Englishmen may take heart again, and await with the keenest interest the development of the new spirit.

M. JEUNE.